

Sturgeon Spearing Season 2012: Enforcement Post-Season Synopsis Report

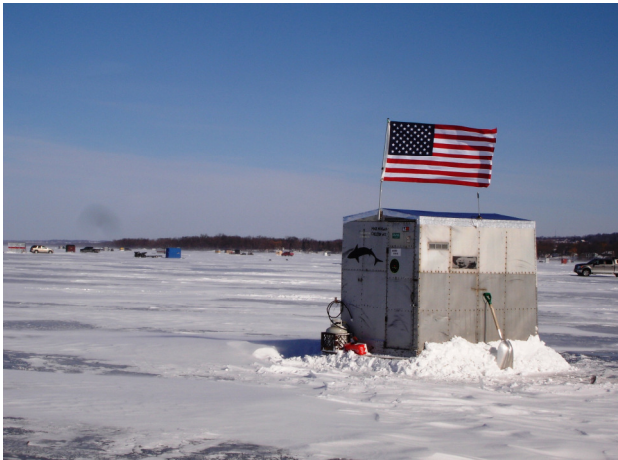


A full 16-day season with record license sales, safety, enforcement – and a lot of public relations

By Warden Supervisor April Dombrowski, Oshkosh

In spite of Wisconsin's warm winter and poor ice conditions, the 2012 lake sturgeon spearing season on the Lake Winnebago System was safe and ran the full 16 days.

This is a much anticipated annual season when Wisconsin's sturgeon spearing traditions are celebrated by entire families, groups of friends and those who simply enjoy riding their snowmobile or all-terrain vehicle and socializing with those after this unique fish.



Conservation wardens always play an important role during this season, and were especially busy due to the record number of those who purchased licenses – 12,680. Because the mild winter temperatures made for poor ice conditions, many license holders were limited to travel by ATV or snowmobile.

This included the wardens, who also used these recreational vehicles to carry out their enforcement, education and public safety duties.

Our wardens responded to citizen complaints, Hotlines, check for license compliance and safe recreational vehicle operation. But the wardens also spent a great deal of time simply answering questions about sturgeon spearing laws, providing sturgeon harvest updates to spearkers on the ice, media requests and assisting fisheries staff at registration stations.

Enforcement contact examples: What wardens encountered on the ice

Wardens Jason Higgins of Oshkosh asked one spearker who was sitting in a shanty to present the fishing license. The subject looked all over and then said it was left at home. The subject got a citation for failing to show the sturgeon tag upon demand.

Warden Tom Truman of Winneconne contacted an individual in Fond du Lac that had been observed spearing a sturgeon on Lake Butte Des Morts. The individual took 23 minutes to validate and attach a carcass tag, then transported the sturgeon un-exposed and unregistered outside of the Upper River Lakes (URL) and Winnebago Driving boundaries. Enforcement action was taken.

Warden Michael Disher of Chilton investigated the illegal loaning and borrowing of a sturgeon spearing tag on Lake Winnebago during the season. Disher conducted interviews and checked

the registration log books. The investigation revealed that a husband speared a large sturgeon and had his wife tag the fish. The wife then registered this sturgeon as her own. Enforcement action was taken for failure to immediately tag a sturgeon, loaning/borrowing tags, and registration fraud.

Warden Kyle Kosin of Campbellsport, *shown in photo at right helping a spearer*, observed an occupied spearing shanty after the close of the season. Kosin contacted the individual and found they were in possession of a spear in the shanty after sturgeon hours were closed. Enforcement action was taken.



Warden Kosin of Campbellsport and Regional Warden Supervisor Byron Goetsch of Green Bay contacted two individuals who were in a spearing shack with an open hole and spear, but neither person possessed a valid spearing license. Enforcement action was taken.

Warden Ryan Propson of Appleton worked recreational vehicle enforcement on Lake Winnebago during the February sturgeon spearing season. Multiple citations were issued for operating unregistered ATVs and snowmobiles, failure to take an ATV/Snowmobile safety course and operating ATV or snowmobiles with modified or loud exhaust systems.

While at a public boat landing, Warden Propson Appleton observed a car was stuck on an ice covered boat ramp with six occupants in it. Propson contacted the driver to offer assistance and promptly smelled the odor of marijuana. Propson notified the Calumet County Sheriff's Office and assisted the responding deputy with interviewing the occupants and searching the vehicle. All six occupants admitted to smoking marijuana in the vehicle while at the boat landing. The juvenile driver was arrested for operating while intoxicated and for possession of marijuana and drug paraphernalia.

While working sturgeon spearing enforcement on Lake Winnebago, Propson entered a sturgeon shanty that smelled like marijuana. The lone occupant admitted he had just finished smoking marijuana about one minute before Propson arrived. The Calumet County Sherriff's Office responded to a nearby boat landing and issued the individual a citation for possession of drug paraphernalia.

A lesson learned

This season the wardens were equipped with extra laths to mark holes in the ice. The top portion of the lath was painted in blaze orange. The message, 1-800-TIP-WDNR, was stenciled in black on one end of the lath. Our wardens used these throughout the season.

When they approached a sturgeon shanty that was not properly marked or found a hole in the ice, the wardens used the laths to mark these areas to prevent someone from driving through.

Here is just one example of how these extra laths were used. This is from Warden Alan Erickson of Fond du Lac:

On Wednesday, February 15, Warden Erickson was patrolling the southeast corner of Lake Winnebago and found an unmarked sturgeon hole. The warden followed the ATV tire tracks and drag marks from the sturgeon shanty that had recently covered this unmarked hole and found the unoccupied shack. It had just been left on the ice and (the owner) had not cut a new hole.



Erickson took down the owner's information written in permanent black marker on the door, and returned to the hole in the ice. There was no lath around the site to mark the hole.

Ericsson used two laths he was carrying and marked the abandoned ice hole.

Later than night, Ericsson got a call from another warden who asked if he had any cases of a marking a hole with a lath because he had received a call.

One of the many ice shanties that dotted the ice.

The caller had asked about penalties for failing to mark a fishing hole after removing the shanty. The caller was told the violation was a criminal charge, which prompted the caller to confess that he had failed to mark the hole Erickson did. The violator was a college student who said he couldn't concentrate in class knowing he had done something wrong. After the warden talked with the student at length, it was determined the student learned a lesson and received a warning instead of a citation.

Wardens also carried with them, black-colored permanent markers to mark shanties with name and residential address on shanties that were not marked or marked inadequately. Approximately 35 contacts were made by wardens for the failure to properly identify a fish/sturgeon shelter.

Public Relations: Wardens talk to all – media, administration, tribes

Prior to and during the season, wardens had a lot of media contacts, providing updates to the sturgeon season and ice conditions. These contacts consisted of TV, radio stations and newspapers from Milwaukee to Green Bay. During the season, there also were ride-alongs with DNR Secretary Cathy Stepp, Senator Jessica King, and Chief Warden Walter Cox and Warden William Cox from the Menominee Indian Tribe. Each day's tours mostly were to show these individuals to the traditions, culture and enforcement. Above: DNR Sturgeon Biologist Ron Bruch with state Sen. Jessica King of Oshkosh.



Violations/Warnings Issued:

Sturgeon Spearing Season		Year 2012	
Insert Warden's Name Here: All			
Violation Type	Arrests	Warnings	
Fish for sturgeon during the closed season		1	
Possess sturgeon during closed season or of illegal size			
Fish with more than 3 hooks, baits, lures	1		
Fish with unattended lines		1	
Take, capture, kill or attempt to take, capture, kill a sturgeon on Lk Winnebago w/o a current non validated sturgeon tag	1	3	
Take, capture, kill or attempt to take, capture, kill a sturgeon on URL's w/o a current non validated sturgeon tag		1	
Fish with or possess hook and line while sturgeon spearing			
Use or possess artificial light during sturgeon spearing season		2	
Cut or use ice hole >48 sq. ft. during sturgeon spearing season			
Possess validated sturgeon spearing tag not attached to a sturgeon			
Fail to immediately validate and attach sturgeon spearing carcass tag		3	
Transport sturgeon not exposed or in a manner that they can not be manipulated	1	20	
Fail to accompany sturgeon during transport until registered			
Fail to register sturgeon (1:30 PM closure at registration station)			
Spearing or possess of spear in fish shelter on Lk Winnebago before/after hours	1	2	
Fail to identify fish shelter when unoccupied or in use		35	
Fishing in a locked fish shelter		2	
Cut or use larger than 12" hole for ice fishing			
Fish w/o a license	1		
Fish (sturgeon) with improper license		1	
Deposit or discharge solid waste on public/private property (water/ice)		2	
Use, or possess, another's license, tag, permit or permit the use by another		9	
Transport unregistered sturgeon outside of allowed driving boundaries from URL's		1	
Provide false information-registration fraud		1	
Possess over daily bag limit of fish		1	
Possess Undersized fish (not sturgeon)	1		
Fail to exhibit approval upon demand	2	20	
Give permission to operate snowmobile w/o valid registration			
Operate snowmobile w/o valid registration	2		
Fail to display or improper display of registration number or decal on snowmobile		20	
Operate snowmobile illegally on or in vicinity of highways			
Failure to slow down and yield to person not on a snowmobile			
Operate snowmobile without valid safety certificate	1	8	
Snowmobile equipment violations	1	1	
Operate snowmobile w/o functioning muffler			
Operate snowmobile at unreasonable, improper speed			
Operate snowmobile in a careless manner			

Operate snowmobile with engine/exhaust noise in excess of legal decibel level		1
Operate snowmobile at speeds greater than 10 mph on frozen waters w/ 100' of person not in or on vehicle or ice shanty		5
Operate snowmobile while under the influence of an intoxicant		
Operate snowmobile greater than 55 MPH during hours of darkness		
Fail to comply w/ regulatory signs-snowmobile		
Operate ATV without headgear		6
Give permission to operate ATV w/o valid registration		
Operate ATV w/o valid registration	8	2
Fail to display or improper display of registration number or decal on ATV		53
Operate ATV illegally on or in vicinity of highways	1	9
Failure to slow down and yield to person not on a ATV		
Operate ATV without valid safety certificate	1	16
ATV equipment violations	3	7
Operate ATV w/o functioning muffler		
Operate ATV at unreasonable, improper speed		
Operate ATV in a careless manner		1
Operate ATV that emits noise greater than 96 decibels		
Operate ATV at speeds greater than 10 mph on frozen waters w/ 100' of person not in or on vehicle or ice shanty		6
Fail to comply w/ regulatory signs-ATV		
Operate ATV while under the influence of an intoxicant		
Fail to transfer registration (ownership) of ATV		2
Permit underage operation of an ATV		
Total Violations	25	242
Total Sturgeon Seized		

Field Warden Opening Weekend Photo Contest: The second annual sturgeon spearing photo contest took place again on opening weekend. Wardens while on patrol and when the opportunity was presented, captured some neat photos that depict some aspects of sturgeon spearing in Wisconsin. Those shown in this report are all from the wardens. Here are a few more:



Above: Successful harvest



Above Right: Go Badgers ice shanty

Right: Register and tagging of sturgeon by DNR fisheries staff



Below: Opening morning on Lake Winnebago

